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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANJUL 000103

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/27/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GA](#)
SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: RECENT GOTG PERSONNEL CHANGES

REF: A. 06 BANJUL 712

1B. BANJUL 95 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) Indicative of President Jammeh's penchant for abrupt cabinet changes, a long-serving member was recently sacked, along with her protege, the number-two at the Foreign Affairs Department. The GOTG's veteran UN Permrep in New York was appointed to the newly established cabinet portfolio for Higher Education, Research, Science, and Technology. Amidst the ongoing controversy over Jammeh's HIV/AIDS treatment program, Jammeh's Press Office Director was removed, and two senior officials of the National Aids Secretariat's resigned. END

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SUMMARY.

DEPARTURE OF VETERAN CABINET MEMBER, PERMANENT SECRETARY

12. (C) Recent days have witnessed several high-level GOTG personnel changes, most notably the February 20 dismissal of a veteran cabinet member, Secretary of State (minister) for Trade, Industry, and Employment, Susan Waffa-Ogoo. One of only two persons to have served continuously in the cabinet since the 1994 coup that brought President Yahya Jammeh to power, Waffa-Ogoo was considered personally close to Jammeh as the two had grown up in the same household. In the GOTG's announcement, no reason was given for Jammeh's decision to remove her, although a knowledgeable contact claimed that Jammeh had acted because of complaints that she had ignored foreign businesspeople interested in pursuing trade opportunities here. The GOTG has yet to name a successor, and we are told that so far at least one businessman approached by Jammeh has declined to accept the position.

13. (C) Also recently sacked was Foreign Affairs Permanent William Joof (deputy formin equivalent). Our sources indicate that, although Joof was considered a protege of Waffa-Ogoo, their dismissals were not linked. We are told that Joof, only recently reinstated following an earlier sacking (ref a), was dismissed on this second occasion for embezzlement of official funds. His successor is Bai Ousman Secka, uncle of Foreign Affairs Secretary of State Bala Garba Jahumpa and a veteran civil servant and diplomat who previously served as Permanent Secretary in several ministries as well as Ambassador to the U.S. and elsewhere. We had occasional dealings with Secka during his previous stint as Permanent Secretary of Defense and found him to be among the stronger performers in senior GOTG ranks.

CREATION OF NEW CABINET POSITION

¶4. (C) On February 23, the GOTG announced the appointment of a senior diplomat, Crispin Grey-Johnson, as Secretary of State for the newly established portfolio of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology. Grey-Johnson was previously the GOTG's long-serving UN Permrep in New York. Contacts agree that his major task will be to accelerate the development of The Gambia's sole, fledgling university. In our meetings with Grey-Johnson during his visits to The Gambia, we found him to be a diehard supporter of Jammeh and his ruling APRC party.

DISMISSAL OF JAMMEH'S PRESS OFFICE DIRECTOR, RESIGNATIONS
FROM PRESIDENTIAL NATIONAL AIDS SECRETARIAT

¶5. (C) Amidst the ongoing controversy over Jammeh's claim of a cure for HIV/AIDS and associated treatment program (ref b), our sources confirm the dismissal of Presidential Press Office Director Mamsit Ceesay due to Jammeh's dissatisfaction over local media coverage of that program. We are told that Ceesay was also removed as Chief Editor of the "Daily Observer," the GOTG's mouthpiece. The institution heretofore spearheading the GOTG's anti-HIV/AIDS effort, National Aids Secretariat (NAS) has lost two senior officials through resignation. According to foreign wire service reports, NAS Director Saihou Ceesay and Administrator Aisha Baldeh felt compelled to step down as they were unwilling to endorse Jammeh's treatment program.

COMMENT

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¶6. (C) Waffa-Ogoo's departure is the latest evidence of Jammeh's penchant for making abrupt changes in his cabinet, usually without explanation, as in this case. The appointment of Secka as the number-two at Foreign Affairs may well prove to be positive, as he replaces an increasingly lackluster Joof, while Secretary of State Jahumpa is among the cabinet's weaker members. END

COMMENT

STAFFORD